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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MOSCOW 000530

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DEPARTMENT FOR PRM/ECA

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TAGS: [PREF](#) [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: NORTH CAUCASUS SECURITY: CHECHNYA BETTER, OTHERS
WORSE, SAY AID WORKERS

REF: MOSCOW 207

Classified By: POL M/C Alice G. Wells, reason 1.4 (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: While the security environment in Chechnya has stabilized sufficiently to allow the Danish Refugee Council to base its operations in Grozny, Ingushetiya and Dagestan are experiencing increased violence due to separatist and extremist activities, high unemployment rates, easy availability of arms and explosives, and ineffective law enforcement agencies, the UN and NGOs report. Unpredictable attacks and, even more so, federal governmental ambivalence regarding foreign humanitarian presence make the North Caucasus a difficult operating environment, according to expatriates doing PRM-funded humanitarian work in the region.
End Summary.

UN Presents Mixed Picture

¶2. (SBU) A February 11 United Nations Department of Safety and Security Russian Federation (UNDSS) "concept paper" provided to Refcoord summarized mixed developments in North Caucasus security and its effect on the ability of foreign humanitarian aid workers to undertake their mission:

-- Chechnya: The UN notes "perceptible improvement in the security environment." Thanks to tight control by forces answerable to Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, the UN was able to increase humanitarian missions to Chechnya from 136 in 2006 to 156 in 2007.

-- Ingushetiya: The UN recorded an up-tick in violence against law enforcement and government authorities. This "remained the most unstable and unpredictable republic in terms of security situation during 2007" in spite of enhanced government counter-terrorist operations.

-- Dagestan: As in Ingushetiya "(T)he unpredictable security situation is dominated by armed clashes between law enforcement agencies and militants, a high crime rate,...and increasing dexterity of militants in using explosive devices." The UN observed that "(b)ombings and targeting of civilian officials, spiritual leaders and law enforcement personnel took place regularly and (are) likely to continue in future."

Furthermore, the UN paper noted that, region-wide, "Despite the low level of home invasion and car-hijacking, kidnapping remains a perceived threat for the UN operations in view of the social tradition (sic) of kidnapping for ransom and other types of abduction."

13. (C) Geographic and social isolation, inadequate health care, and constant government monitoring of their activities are the main hardships afflicting humanitarian workers in the North Caucasus, according to Jo Hegenauer, Jr., a Canadian who is UN Area Security Coordinator and UNHCR Head of Office for the North Caucasus. "Someone is shot and killed or a bomb goes off every day" in Ingushetiya Hegenauer said, but expatriates remain fairly safe. Hegenauer attributed this to Russian concerns over western perceptions as the GOR builds up to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, not in "Russia having too much at stake should an aid worker get hurt."

14. (C) Reflecting on his 22-year career in humanitarian aid during a February 20 conversation, Hegenauer said his three years in the Caucasus had been the most difficult. The main obstacle to his agency's effectiveness, he maintained, was the host nation's "essential antipathy" to outside involvement in its internal affairs. The GOR will find a way to compromise even "squeaky clean" expatriates whose work it fears will undermine government authority. Unlike in a place with a failed or transitioning government, in Russia all the structures are in place to keep aid workers under constant surveillance, Hegenauer regretted.

15. (SBU) Hegenauer's younger colleagues in the field express greater anxiety. Refcood met February 11 with Thomas Hill, the International Refugee Committee (IRC) Russia Country Director and spoke by telephone with Siobhan Kimmerle, Russian Federation Program Director for World Vision. Both are American citizens in their early 30s with fluent Russian and previous experience in development work. Hill had recently attended IRC's Regional Management Conference in

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Bangkok, Thailand, bringing together country representatives serving in the Caucasus and Asia. Kimmerle had attended a World Vision field representatives' meeting in Cyprus in December. Both reported that, based on their and their colleagues' accounts of obstacles to achieving their aid objectives, their organizations have concluded that the North Caucasus is a hardship post on a par with Afghanistan.

16. (C) Hill affirmed that tension in Ingushetiya has grown steadily since Autumn 2007 as local communities have started expressing their frustration at perceived favoritism, nepotism, and weakness in President Murat Zyazikov's administration. The Ingush, Hill concluded, want a strongman like Chechnya's Ramzan Kadyrov. Hill, who moved to the North Caucasus with IRC in September 2007, reported that he has rewritten the Ingushetiya office's security plan, basing his revisions on his organization's procedures in Afghanistan. Based on increased violence in Ingushetiya, Hill has drawn up contingency plans in the event IRC is forced to close its Nazran office. Hill allows his expatriate staff to spend only three nights and two days at a stretch in monitoring the IRC's programs in Chechnya. That leaves Vladikavkaz, where the expatriate staff live a 45-minute drive from Nazran, as a potential base of operations, but IRC's local (Muslim) staff are not safe in (predominantly Christian) North Ossetiya.

17. (C) Meanwhile, official corruption is an ongoing barrier to efficient INGO operations, Hill regretted. Movement through republican border checkpoints is a problem. This winter, two of his local staff lost their driver's licenses when they refused to pay bribes on a journey to Kabardino-Balkaria for staff training. In December 2007 Chechen officials denied IRC permission to work with the organization's chosen local partner on an EU-funded community mobilization infrastructure project, charging that the local group, Save the Generation, did not operate transparently. The Chechens recommended a different local partner, an organization that had not even applied for the tender. When IRC objected, the authorities recommended a third

organization, one that had applied for the tender -- but by this time IRC was so suspicious of republican officials' motives that it resolved to use its own staff.

18. (C) Kimmerle expressed frustration similar to Hill's. The previous Saturday she had wanted to travel from her Vladikavkaz apartment to World Vision's Nazran office to spend a couple of hours catching up on work, she said, but was refused by her security chief. Later, she learned that there had been an explosion at a checkpoint she would have needed to traverse.

DRC to Move to Grozny

19. (C) One NGO, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), has decided to abandon its Nazran headquarters and base its operations in Grozny from March 2008. In a February 14 conversation with Refcood, Eugene Sienkiewicz, DRC's Head of Program, said that DRC is in the final stages of closing its Ingushetiya office and finding apartments in Grozny for its expatriate staff, who until now have resided in Vladikavkaz. Sienkiewicz, a 56-year-old American citizen, observed that "Ingushetiya is particularly uncomfortable right now," but added that the "constant, low-level" violence appears targeted at local officials and Russian-speaking residents, not expatriate aid workers. Sienkiewicz echoed other assessments that place blame for the unrest in Ingushetiya on dissatisfaction with Zyazikov's leadership and outrage at authorities' overly harsh and arbitrary law enforcement, he posited; in Chechnya, from pro-independence and anti-Russian feeling. (Note: DRC operates only through a local partner in Dagestan, and its expatriate staff do not travel there. End note.)

110. (C) In Chechnya, Sienkiewicz noted, Kadyrov has successfully pacified the territory north of the mountains, including Grozny, but people still do not feel safe outdoors after dark. DRC will require its staff to observe an 8 p.m. curfew once they move to the Chechen capital. Their apartments will be located sufficiently close to each other to share a guard post, thus keeping security expenses down. (Note: World Vision and IRC achieve the same objective by using group houses, something DRC's somewhat older staff wishes to avoid. End note.) For any kind of movement, DRC will continue to use three or four armed guards and a couple of vehicles with drivers, just as it now does in Ingushetiya.

Donor Considerations

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111. (C) Comment: Humanitarian assistance in the Russian Federation is a frustrating business because the federal government is wary of "interference" and weary of INGO presence in a region it prefers to present as poised for prosperity. For the foreseeable future, humanitarian operations in the North Caucasus will require carefully planned static and mobile security arrangements. International aid organization staff are encouraged by the appreciation of local government officials bent on reconstruction, and by the gratitude of aid recipients who fear being forgotten by the outside world. The lesson for donors is that security must continue to be an essential component of cooperative agreements. End Comment.
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